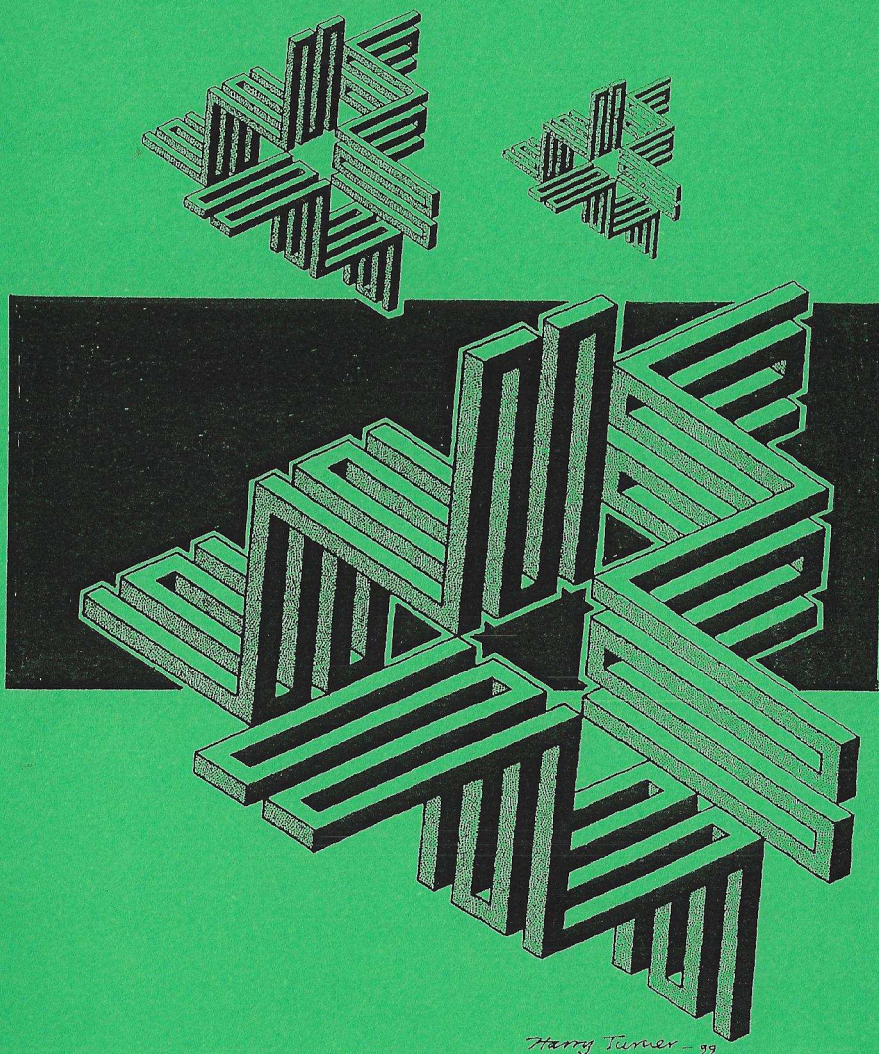


NOVACON 29



Harry Tamer - 99

Progress Report #4

NOVACON 29

Date: 5th-7th November 1999.

Venue: The Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham.

Guest of Honour: Ian Stewart.

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £32.00 in advance or £35.00 on the door. Postal registrations should be received by 30th October 1999, after this time please join on the door. Supporting membership costs £15.00 throughout. Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to "Novacon 29" and sent with your completed form(s) to: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. For further information check our web site at <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n29/n29.html>

Room Rates: £37.50 per person per night for people sharing twin/double rooms and £42.50 pppn for single rooms (inclusive of full English breakfast). NB: Hotel booking forms, and deposits of £20.00 per person, should have been received by Carol Morton no later than **16th October 1999**. After this date rooms cannot be guaranteed – but please call Carol at the number below to check the situation. Cheques for room deposits should be made payable to "The Britannia Hotel". Enquires regarding hotel bookings should be sent to Carol at the address above or you can call her on 01384 825386 (before 9pm).

Advertising Rates: Although it is too late to advertise this year, advertising is welcome for *Novacon 30's* publications. The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets): Progress Reports - Professional £25.00 (£13.00) full page, £14.50 (£8.00) half page, £8.50 (£5.00) quarter page. Programme Book - Professional £60.00 (£31.00) full page, £32.00 (£15.50) half page, £18.00 (£9.50) quarter page. Anyone interested in advertising should contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail address empties@breathemail.net). Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below: **Deadlines:** Progress Report #2 - 4th March 2000, to be mailed late April 2000; #3 - 15th July 2000, to be mailed late August 2000; #4 - 16th September 2000, to be mailed mid October 2000; Programme Book - 30th September 2000, distributed at Novacon 30; Novacon 31 Progress Report #1 - 4th October 1999, to be distributed at Novacon 30.

Committee: Carol Morton (Chair) and Tony Morton (Treasurer), 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, (tel: 01384-825386 - before 9pm, e-mail MORTON@CABLENET.CO.UK); Maureen Kincaid Speller (Programme), 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, (novacon@achestis.demon.co.uk); Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (tel: 0114 281 1572, e-mail dream@netcomuk.co.uk); Pat McMurray (Hotel Liaison), 28 Plaistow Grove, Bromley, Kent, BR1 3PB (pat@cooky.demon.co.uk); Chris Murphy (Operations), 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA, (NB new e-mail chris.murphy@bigfoot.com); Martin Tudor (Publications), 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (empties@breathemail.net)

Acknowledgements: Harry Turner for his cover illustration; Tony Berry, Maureen Kincaid Speller, Pat McMurray, Carol Morton, Chris Murphy and Ian Stewart for their articles. Uncredited contributions written by Martin Tudor. This Progress Report was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier, contact Martin Tudor at the above address for details of WAVE's competitive prices.

Chair's Piece

by Carol Morton

This is the last Progress Report before the con itself – only (at time of writing) 3½ weeks to go. Yet there is still so much to do.

I have finally been able to pin down the hotel on the most important things relevant to con membership – food and drink. After some four months of silence from the hotel I now have something in writing from them – good luck to next year's committee. Complete information will be provided in the Read Me Inside at the con, but just to whet your appetite – the beer will be Bombardier Premium Bitter (OG 1042, ABV 4.3%) priced at £1.80-£1.85 per pint. Soft drinks will be 75p per half. I had to negotiate pretty hard on the latter as the hotel were going to charge £1.00 per half, I only got confirmation of the price reduction yesterday (Thursday 8th October).

As far as the programme goes, we are hoping to have a multi-author signing session on the Friday evening organised by Andromeda. This should feature such authors as Brian W Aldiss who will be signing copies of *WHITE MARS* and the paperback edition of *IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE*, and Peter F Hamilton signing *THE NAKED GOD*, the third part of his *Night's Dawn* trilogy.

Saturday evening will see the introduction to fandom of a new live band. An all girl four-piece (not five as reported last time - because one member has left). Tony (my hubby and treasurer for Novacon 29) and I saw them at a Dudley council "do", we were very impressed and booked them for Novacon on the spot. OK so they are 16-17 year olds but they are very talented (and will be closely chaperoned – take note!).

Sunday sees the return of the obligatory beer tasting. If you have any pet beers you want to unleash on the unsuspecting Novacon membership bring them along. Three bottles = free entry into the tasting, or if you don't want to bring beer £4.50 will buy you a badge. We will of course be having two firkins of real ale – Enville White (that's mine) and Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild (don't tell Dave Holmes).

Apart from the above, the usual will be happening, auctions, silly games, panels and my favourite Professor's guest of honour speech.

One not so pleasant thing is that New Street will again be closed to traffic. It's not quite as bad as last year as the closure comes into effect at 10am on Saturday 6th November. That means that we can unload on the Friday in the loading bay in New Street outside the front of the hotel.

But the loading of vehicles prior to departure will have to be done either by leaving before 10am in the morning, waiting until 10pm on the Sunday night or moving stuff over to Corporation Street, as the road will be closed from 10am to 10pm daily. Strong backs and trolleys will be available to help should anyone need it. Sorry about this, but it is something that is not under the control of the hotel, it was decided by the City Centre Manager and is not open to negotiation. If you have any problems please contact me on 01384 825386 (before 9pm please) or e-mail me at MORTON@CABLEINET.CO.UK.

Remember those beers, and see you at the con.

The New Hari Seldon by Ian Stewart

"Gaal Dornick, using non-mathematical concepts, has defined psychohistory to be that branch of mathematics which deals with the reactions of human conglomerates to fixed social and economic stimuli...

"Implicit in all these definitions is the assumption that the human conglomerate being dealt with is sufficiently large for valid statistical treatment... The necessary size of such a conglomerate may be determined by Seldon's First Theorem which..."

So does the Encyclopaedia Galactica introduce the future science of psychohistory and its founder Hari Seldon, central figure of the classic Foundation trilogy and the future history into which it has now been embedded by Asimov himself and quite a few others --- most recently, Gregory Benford, Greg Bear, and David Brin with their 'Second Foundation Trilogy'.

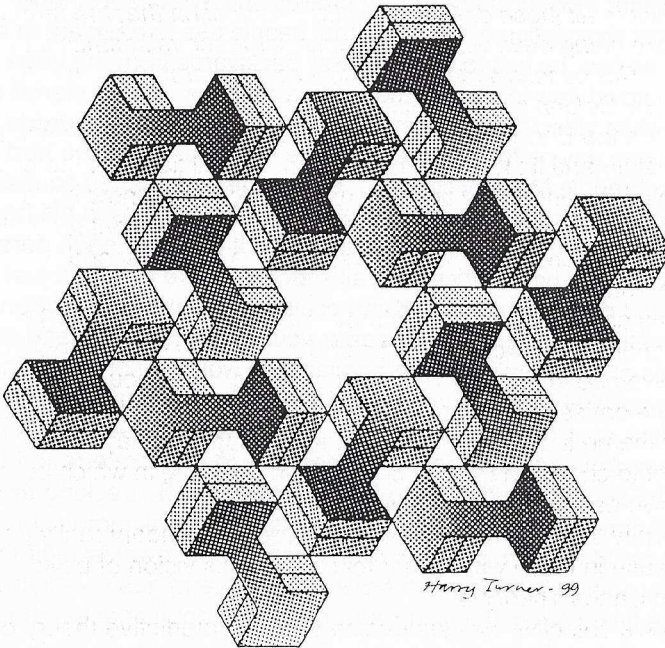
Writing as he did in 1951, Asimov was unaware of 'Chaos Theory' and the phenomenon of deterministic chaos, whereby simple non-random rules can give rise to complex random (-seeming) behaviour. He remedied the omission in later extensions of the original trilogy, and chaos is a central theme in the Second Foundation Trilogy. Today we have a complement to chaos, the theory of Complex Systems, in which complex rules can give rise to simple behaviour.

It is a pity that Asimov died before Complexity Theory really got going, because in many ways it is a lot closer to his vision of psychohistory than Chaos Theory is.

Seldon's objective was to develop a formal, predictive theory of 'the human conglomerate'. In recent years a latter-day Hari Seldon, Keith Still,

has discovered that Complexity Theory can be used to make specific, verifiable predictions about one aspects of the human conglomerate --- the flow of crowds. Keith's system is known as Legion --- largely because of a reference in Red Dwarf, although it is true that the Bible got there first. Legion has formed the basis of a rapidly growing company, Legion Crowd Dynamics UK Ltd., which applies Keith's methods to model the flow of crowds in public places --- sports stadiums, shopping centres, airports, and the like.

Legion is first and foremost a safety technique, helping architects avoid repeating tragedies like the Hillsborough disaster of April 1989, where 96 people at a soccer match were crushed to death against barriers that had been intended to protect them. However, it can also be used to make the flow of crowds more efficient, and in future may be able to improve the profitability of airport concessions by determining better layouts of shops on the concourses. Other applications of the same basic ideas include road traffic flow, supermarket trolleys, car parks, railway station layout... and those are just the beginning.



The origins of Legion go back to 1992, at the Freddie Mercury Memorial AIDS Awareness Concert at Wembley Stadium. Keith was standing in a crowd (total size around 70,000) at Gate C, waiting to get in. He realised that while the crowd as a whole was moving, his bit wasn't, and he wondered why. He decided to find out, and he began by looking at what was already known. He wasn't greatly impressed.

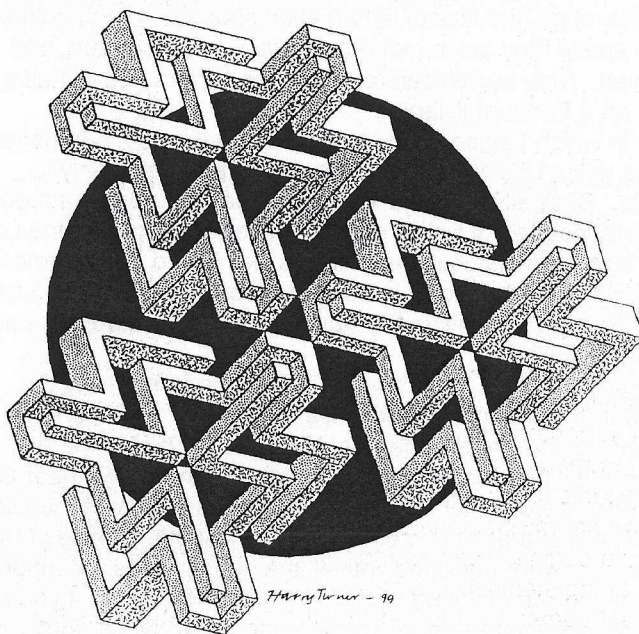
Traditional models of crowds treat them like a fluid, but this is distinctly unsatisfactory. The belief that crowds 'find their own level' --- that is, distribute themselves evenly --- is based on this fluid model, and it was one of the factors that contributed to Hillsborough. It leads to the belief that as long as the total size of the crowd does not exceed the capacity of the stadium, then people will be able to find their way inside safely. At Hillsborough, however, over-dense crowds built up in some areas while others were almost empty. The reason is straightforward: individuals in a crowd do not have complete knowledge of how the crowd is distributed. They follow local signs, and very often 'go along with the herd': they usually do not know that somewhere half way round the stadium there is plenty of free space.

Crowds are confusing things: they look random and yet they are composed of people who have a pretty clear idea of where they want to go. Keith spent months studying real crowds and evolved a simple mathematical description of the rules that people use to navigate in a crowd. To do this, he had to work his way backwards from the large scale patterns of crowd flow to deduce the underlying rules. So he stared at black-and-white video footage from 48 CCTV cameras for hundreds of hours, until one day he found himself on the roof near where he had been stuck at the Freddie Mercury concert. By now he had studied so many crowds that he found himself doing time-lapse photography in his head, a fundamental shift of viewpoint. Breakthrough! It was as if each person left a kind of 'wake' behind them, a trail showing where they had just been. Instead of random chaos, Keith could see elements of hidden order. Sometimes two groups of people would meet head on, and after a few seconds of apparently random jiggling they would resolve into interpenetrating parallel lines, the way your fingers pass through each other when you lock your hands together. Or groups would crystallise, and lock solid, as they jammed up against a barrier, only to evaporate round the edges as the people found ways to free themselves. By tracking the paths of several nearby individuals, making the temporal dimension explicit, he could begin to see how individuals aimed towards their long-term goal by setting themselves a series of short-term goals --- trying to reach the next corner, the next barrier, the next open space that led in

roughly the right direction. But those short-term goals constantly had to be revised. People would head towards a short-term goal, only to find that somebody else, heading towards their goal, had got in the way. So they would revise their goal, only to find the same thing happening again.

It turned out that most of the choices people make in a crowd are simple-minded and short-term. However, they also have a long-range objective: to get to a seat, or front of stage, or the bar. Mathematically, this makes crowd flow very different from more traditional problems. It has a curious mixture of local and global features; moreover some components, such as the people, are discrete units, whereas others, such as the directions in which they are heading, are continuous. It is an unorthodox hybrid with no useful body of known theory.

One fact stood out: the same patterns would form in the same places, no matter what the event. This meant that the key to crowd dynamics is not the intricacies of human psychology, but universal mathematical patterns created by individuals that move and interact with each other in some surrounding geometry.



By building a computer model of a crowd as a large 'conglomerate' of individual entities, and equipping each entity with these rules, Keith hoped to predict the overall flow-patterns of the crowd. This is a Complex Systems approach. Initially he was limited to rather small crowds, because he was using a virtual reality system to model the behaviour, and its method for such functions as collision-detection (make sure two people do not occupy the same region of space simultaneously) was cumbersome. In fact his VR platform could handle only 225 people --- not enough for a realistic crowd. He needed more computing power, or so he thought. When the new ultra-fast Pentium chip came on the market, he eagerly anticipated a big improvement, but to his disappointment the system was still only capable of handling 225 people.

Keith didn't realise it at the time, but he was up against a notorious problem in computer programming: intractability. When the VR system 'moved' objects around it had to prevent them interpenetrating, so whenever any object was moved it had to be checked against all the others. Every time the software updated the screen display, it had to look at every possible pair of objects. But as the number of objects grew, the number of pairs grew much faster. For example with 10 objects there are 45 pairs, but with 100 objects there are nearly five thousand. A second technical breakthrough, the idea of 'information space' in which entities interrogate the space they are in, not other entities, was needed, and eventually arrived. Now Legion can routinely handle a crowd of half a million entities on a Pentium III laptop.

The way in which Legion 'predicts' crowd flow would have made excellent sense to Hari Seldon. Its predictions match reality only in certain respects. Basically, it 'works' when the questions being asked are about large-scale features of typical crowds (in particular geometries and with particular statistical distributions of things like speed of movement). A dangerous build-up of the crowd in some area of the building is a typical and important example; another is the rate at which the crowd can pass through a line of turnstiles.

What Legion does not predict --- not in specific terms --- is the actual movement of any particular individual in a crowd. If it were to model the crowds at the Freddie Mercury Memorial AIDS Awareness Concert at Wembley, it would be able to predict that the crowd near Gate C would get stuck. It would not be able to predict that Keith Still would be one of the members of that bit of crowd, though. Not even if one of the entities in the model were equipped with all the right speeds, intentions, and so forth that correspond to Keith Still. Why not? Because if you put the same people in the same places in the same crowd twice, they won't

do exactly the same things. There's a little bit of randomness, and at some point this might make them pass an oncoming person by moving to the right instead of the left. After that, their detailed progress through the crowd could be very different. Nonetheless, the overall flow of the crowd is insensitive to such differences --- maybe someone else follows the track that the original Keith followed, at least for a while. This is exactly the point of view adopted by Hari Seldon, and Asimov's prescience here is astonishing.

The deep mathematical point here is 'emergence'. The complex system of 70,000 or whatever entities creates a kind of 'group behaviour' that has large scale simplicities --- a build-up of people here, a scarcity there, funny 'fingering' effects when two crowds moving in opposite directions have to pass through each other. The details of where these patterns come from in any particular case may be very complicated, but the patterns themselves are simple, and to some extent 'typical' of all crowds in that geometry under those conditions. This makes the system's predictions robust: run similar crowds through the same geometry several times and you get pretty much the same results for the large-scale emergent features of the flow, even if many tiny details change. And for most applications, that's all you need.

Legion has now been developed into a fully-fledged design tool. The user can set up the geometry of the building; determine objectives for each person in the crowd; adjust internal functions to suit different types of crowd --- children, elderly people, mothers with babies; choose how many of each; determine how fast they can move and react. The system sets up the corresponding equations, and solves them by numerical simulation; then it plots the resulting crowd flow, and monitors any interesting variables. In particular it works out the 'space utilisation' --- how many people visit a given region of floor in a given time. Space utilisation is important in commercial applications because areas that are seldom occupied are, in effect, wasted space. You can change the building's geometry and see if that improves the use of space. Or, having packed your building with people, you can simulate an emergency, watch them evacuate the building, and see how long it took them and whether any dangerous jams built up --- and if so, where. If the result is unsatisfactory, you re-design the layout accordingly and try again --- the ultimate 'what if?' design tool.

Legion has been used for several major projects, including the Hong Kong Jockey Club and very recently the Sydney Olympics. Keith has written a PhD thesis about the system. Certain commercially valuable details are not publicly available, but the general ideas have

been described in several places, in particular my Penguin book *Life's Other Secret* (chapter 10). Legion also featured in the 1997 Christmas Lectures.

Legion is one step towards a genuine kind of psychohistory, one that gets round the effects of chaos by focussing on robust emergent properties of complex systems. It makes real one of Hari Seldon's dreams from *Prelude to Foundation*: "...a tool that might make it possible to identify what was good and what was bad for humanity. With it, decisions we would make would be less blind."

About 740 Words: The Programme by Maureen Kincaid Speller

'We need 1,000 words on the Programme,' Martin said.

'But the programme should speak for itself. If we've succeeded in putting together the sort of stimulating and entertaining programme we've been planning, there's really nothing more to say.'

'It's just that we've got a 1,000 word gap in the last Progress Report.'

'By the time that goes out, people will just want to know how to get to the convention. The fact that there's this really thought-provoking programme with lots of exciting ideas isn't actually going to make much of a difference at that stage.'

'And we need something for the Programme Book.'

'Everyone reads the Programme Book after the convention. They'll already know what a great programme it was by then.'

'Some don't. There's quite a lot of people who sit down and read the Programme Book right at the start. We need to tell them what they've got to look forward to.'

'They'll have the Read Me, won't they? That actually spells out what's on the programme.'

'All that does is give the titles of the panels and the names of the participants. You can't say much about the thinking behind it, the themes and the ideas that went into the programme.'

'We've been doing Novacons for nearly 30 years now, people know what to expect. A single stream of programming with a good mixture of serious items and silly things.'

'Yes, but you could talk about how it's all inspired by our Guest of Honour.'

'There's a piece about Ian Stewart in the Programme Book anyway, isn't there?'

'Of course, but it doesn't say anything about how we've built the programme around him.'

'You make him sound like an architectural feature. Anyway it's obvious, isn't it, that having an excellent Guest of Honour like Ian Stewart gives us a marvellous opportunity to look at science and science fiction? After all, since he's the co-author of *The Science of Discworld* we've got a great starting point for a panel on the plethora of Science in Science Fiction books that are being published at the moment. And after his 1997 Royal Institution Christmas Lecture he's got some hilarious behind-the-scenes stories, so we'd be daft not to a re-run his talk on the subject, particularly as he's got some new stories about Japan...'

'Okay, that is all pretty obvious, but you could say something about anniversaries.'

'Oh, you mean that since this is the 40th anniversary of C.P. Snow's influential and controversial lecture on the Two Cultures, we're staging a discussion that will consider whether science fiction provides the focal point where the two cultures of science and the arts finally do meet?'

'Precisely.'

'But what else is there to say about it that won't pre-empt the discussion?'

'Hmm, I see your point. Isn't there a special presentation you could talk about?'

'Well over the years many of us have donated to one of fandom's favourite charities, which is ensuring that science fiction is well represented among the tape books for the blind. So during the convention there will be a presentation on behalf of the RNIB followed by a panel which will discuss the books so far chosen for the scheme. Are they really the best representatives of science fiction?'

'See, you can do it. And what about fandom, after all Novacon has always been a very fannish convention so there has to be something about that on the programme.'

'There is. We've got Pete Weston leading a panel on the Myths of Fandom, which sounds fascinating. And, of course, we've got the big Novacon Debate. This year we're debating "Wither the Nova Awards?", which should get a very lively discussion going.'

'It's not all serious, is it?'

'Good grief, I hope you don't think all that is serious. Some of it's really meaty stuff that everyone should be able to get their teeth in, and some of it should be light and amusing. And there are things that fall somewhere in between. For instance, we've got one panel where we discuss the survival skills of fandom. Heaven knows what that might produce. And there's all the usual stuff, of course.'

'The usual stuff?'

'You know, silly game and quiz, book and art auction, the Fan Fund auction on Saturday evening, the band and disco, the award ceremony, all the things that really make it a Novacon. There, how's that?'

'It'll do, I suppose.'

[Maureen, who has bravely volunteered to do the Programme next year as well, can be contacted at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, England or via novacon@acnestis.demon.co.uk]

The International Beer Tasting

On Sunday night from 8pm we will be hosting the latest in a long series of Novacon Beer Tastings, using the ever-popular BYOB (bring

your own beer) format.

To get the ball rolling the convention hopes to have two local beers on draught, Envile White (OG 1042, ABV 4%) and Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild (OG 1058, ABV 6%), as well as a few interesting bottles - the rest is up to you!

To take part, all you need to do is bring at least THREE bottles of your favourite British or foreign beer to the convention and check them in at the Novacon Registration desk when you arrive. In return you will receive a "BEER BADGE" which will entitle you to drink the beer at the Tasting on Sunday.

Alternatively, you can also take part in the Tasting by buying a BEER BADGE for £4.50 from Novacon Registration.

All Novacon members are welcome to attend the Tasting. The convention is supplying an assortment of exotic and/or unusual non-alcoholic drinks at the Tasting, which will be free to everyone, but only those with BEER BADGES will be entitled to drink the beer.

For further information, contact the Beer Tasting Organiser, Tony Berry, at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP (e-mail tony@berryt.freeseve.co.uk).

[Remember, although we have come to an arrangement with the Britannia regarding corkage for the Tasting, this does not extend to you bringing in your own supplies of drink. The Hotel can and will charge corkage to people smuggling food or drink into the hotel!]

Operations by Chris Murphy

As we are sure most of you are aware Novacon, like most conventions in Britain, is run by volunteers and we can't have too many of them! So if you are willing to help out at the convention - anything from moving chairs to helping with tech ops or working on the programme, please contact me, Chris Murphy, at 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA, (e-mail chris.murphy@bigfoot.com).

Registration and Operations will be in the same place as last year, first on the left as you come out of the second floor lifts. Unlike last year we shall be operating a farseist 'tidy' Ops Room policy, with designated areas for stuff to be stored and no non-essential furniture (or people). However, you will still be able to leave coats and bags in Ops on request and **at your own risk**.

Hotel Bookings

Hotel booking forms (along with deposits of £20.00 per person) should have been received by Carol Morton no later than **16th October 1999**. However DON'T PANIC! Although we can no longer *guarantee* you a room after this date, as we went to press rooms were still available. Please call Carol at the number below to check the situation.

By the time you read this all Hotel Booking forms received will have been passed to the hotel, so you should receive confirmation from them shortly – if you haven't done already.

As Carol mentioned last time because the hotel has insufficient 'comfy' chairs to furnish the two convention bars, we have agreed that they may be removed from the bedrooms for use in these bars.

However, if you feel strongly that you want your 'comfy' chair to remain in your room please let Carol know as soon as possible. She can be contacted by telephone on 01384-825386 (before 9pm, please) or e-mail MORTON@CABLEINET.CO.UK. Failing that you can always write to 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

The hotel's room rates are £42.50 per person per night in a single room and £37.50 per person per night in a twin or double, both inclusive of full English breakfast. The enclosed hotel booking form explains all this. We also require from you a £20 per person deposit for your rooms. So please enclose a cheque made payable to "The Britannia Hotel".

The balance of your room costs will have to be paid on arrival at the hotel. Those of you who attended Novacon 28 or have been to the Adelphi in Liverpool for an Eastercon will be accustomed to this as it is standard policy at Britannia Hotels.

The Nova Awards by Tony Berry

The Nova awards are presented annually for work in fanzines. For a fanzine or piece to qualify for this year's awards, it must be published for the first time between 1st October 1998 and 30th September 1999. Below is a list of fanzines which have come my way this year. It is by no means exhaustive, but designed as an *aide memoire*. (Bit of French there to show we're in Europe).

ANSIBLE #136-146. Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire. RG1 5AU.

ANTI-BACKUOUS VACKLASH #1. Amanda Baker, Bridget Bradshaw & Vicki Rosenzweig, Department of Physics & Astronomy, PO Box 913, Cardiff University, Wales, CF2 3YB.

BANANA WINGS #12-14. Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA, and Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, CR0 6JE.

BARMAID #2-7. Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpey, Worcestershire, DY12 1NP.

BOB #15. Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY.

DID I SAY THAT OUT LOUD # 3. Debbi Kerr, 38 Bankfield Terrace, Burley, Leeds, LS4 2RE.

FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM # 2-5. John Berry, 4 Chilterns, South Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 8JU, and Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Rd., Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 2PH.

INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER # 2. Joseph Nicholas & Judith Hanna, 15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London, N15 4JU.

KERLES # 2. Tommy Ferguson, 40 Deramore Avenue, Belfast, BT7 3ER, Northern Ireland.

MIRA # 2. Michael Abbott, 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge, CB1 3QF.

O.K. KEN. Tony Berry, 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.

OLAF # 3. Ken Cheslin (address above).

PARAKEET # 1-3. Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer (address above).

PLOKTA Vol. 4 nos. 2-3. Steve Davies, Alison Scott & Mike Scott, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 2RP.

All of the above fanzines are available for "The Usual", which means in exchange for other fanzines, contributions, or in response to letters of comment. In the first instance a polite letter of request accompanied by postage or a large stamped, self-addressed envelope, works fine.

[Enclosed with this Progress Report you should have received a copy of the 1999 Nova Awards Ballot. Please return this form to: Tony Berry, The Nova Administrator, 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP at least one week before Novacon 29, or post it in the ballot box provided on the Novacon registration desk at the convention before midnight on the Saturday.]

[If you have any enquiries about the Novas or you want a copy of the Rules (50p to cover copying and postage), contact Tony Berry at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP. Or check out the Novacon web site at <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n29/novarule.html>]

Have You Any Room?

We are looking for a new home for the Novacon art boards. If you have a spare room, garage or shed and think you can help please contact Tony Morton on 01384-825386 (before 9pm, please) or e-mail MORTON@CABLENET.CO.UK. Failing that you can always write to 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

Novacon can arrange delivery immediately after this Novacon and will collect and return the boards for and after each subsequent Novacon. (One bonus of this is that if you have any gear you need to transport to and from Novacons the Novacon van can do this at the same time – and give you a lift as well!)

Novacon's RNIB Raffle

As usual we will be selling raffle tickets to raise money for the Royal National Institute for the Blind's "Talking Books for the Blind Project". Last year the raffle raised just over £360 (which we rounded-up to £400), but this year we would like to make that £500.

So, if you have anything you would like to donate as a prize for the raffle please contact Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail empties@breathemail.net). But whatever you do, make sure you buy a ticket or two from Anne Woodford at the convention!

Child Minding

At the last few Novacons Richard Standage and Helena Bowles have offered an informal child minding service at the convention. However, because this facility has not been used for the last couple of years we are not able to offer it this year. Feedback is invited to: Tony Berry, Chairman Novacon 30, 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP (e-mail tony@berryt.freemove.co.uk).

How to Get There by Car

by Tony Berry

From the M6: Get off at J6 and follow the A38(M) (Aston Expressway) towards Birmingham city centre. Eventually, you'll go down an underpass and then see a bit of daylight before going down a second longer underpass which bears round to the left. On resurfacing, exit left off the main drag and go down to Holloway Circus. (You'll pass the new Andromeda). Turn left into Smallbrook Queensway. Take the first left again into Hill Street. About 100 yards along you'll see the main entrance to the Pallasades car park on your right. (£9.00 for 24 hours.) If you're feeling brave you could try for the top entrance, which may get you a little nearer to New Street. Continue along Hill Street and go right at the lights into Navigation Street. You then have to bear left up Pinfold Street and round to the right back down to Navigation Street. The car park entrance is in front of you. Careful how you cross the traffic.

From the M5: Probably best to leave at J3 and follow the A456 towards Birmingham. This brings you on to the Hagley Road which you then follow all the way to Five Ways (Edgbaston Shopping Centre and the Swallow Hotel on your right). Go down the underpass onto Broad Street and along past the I.C.C. Go right round Paradise Circus and along Suffolk Street (A38) then directions as above.

[Please note that if you wish to unload at the Hotel on Friday 5th November before parking your car you can do so using one of the two Britannia Hotel parking bays on New Street beside Boots/Union Passage. For further details see Pat McMurray's piece on "Wheelchair Access" below. To load and unload at the Hotel from Saturday 6th November please refer to "The Complicated Bit" below.]

How to Get There by Train or Coach

By Train: First ensure that you book your ticket to Birmingham New Street and **not** Birmingham International Station.

Leave New Street Station via the escalators, which are facing you as you enter the main concourse from the platforms. These escalators will take you up into the Pallasades Shopping Centre. At the top turn left

and make your way out of the Shopping Centre. Walk down the ramp past McDonalds to the bottom where the HSBC Bank is on your right. At the HSBC Bank look across the street and to your right, across the road, you will see the Britannia Hotel.

Cross over New Street and walk down towards Boots, the main entrance to the Britannia is in a small alleyway called Union Passage.

By Coach: You will arrive at Digbeth Coach Station, leave the station on to the road called Digbeth and turn left. Walk up the hill to the Bull Ring Centre, continue through the Market and turn right, walking up the ramp, towards New Street (and the Rotunda). Walk through the short subway to the steps leading to New Street, at the top of these steps the Rotunda Branch of Lloyds TSB Bank will be on your left. Turn right and cross at the lights, then go left up New Street past BHS and Boots to the alleyway called Union Passage turn right and you'll be facing the main entrance to the Britannia.

Any problems on the day call the Britannia Hotel on 0121 631 3331.

Wheelchair Access by Pat McMurray

If you are arriving on Friday 5th November: from St Martins Circus, Queensway, you will see an exit to the High Street sign-posted "New St Hotels Loading Area". Take this road, and turn immediately left into New Street. (You cannot continue up the High Street, as it's a pedestrianised area).

The Britannia Hotel is on your right, at first floor level above Etams. Look for the blue Britannia flags. The disabled parking bay is immediately on your right as you enter New Street, about 150 metres before the hotel. As far as we can find out, there is no time limit on the disabled bays, providing you have a disabled sticker. This disabled bay has space for four cars.

There are loading bays closer to the hotel, in front of Etams and Boots. You can park there to unload, but even a disabled sticker may not save you from the wrath of Birmingham's Traffic Wardens. A 30 minute stay while you unload should be fine. The hotel recommend that you ask one of their porters to keep an eye on your car while you unload. However there should be dealers etc., unloading there for most of Friday afternoon.

However, you cannot leave your vehicle in any of the New Street bays for the whole convention as New Street will be closed from the Saturday onwards. For details regarding other disabled parking bays please read "The Complicated Bit" below. If you would prefer to leave your car in covered parking once you've unloaded, or if the disabled bays are full, parking is available in the Pallasades carpark (24 hours, £9). See directions above for getting to there.

The entrance to the hotel is up an alleyway called Union Passage, underneath the Britannia sign. The alleyway slopes at about one to twenty.

The main entrance comprises a revolving door, leading to a small landing at the top of three stairs down to the ground floor reception. There is also a fire exit which can be opened from the inside, which leads to the same small landing. It appears possible to get an ordinary manual or powered wheelchair through the fire exit onto the landing. The hotel have a ramp for the three steps which they will lay down for the weekend. The fire exits are alarmed, but we'll ask them to switch the alarm off for the weekend. In the nature of things they will almost certainly forget to do these things, and switch the alarms on and take the ramp up at every shift changeover, but we shall do our best.

If you have a scooter or large trolley which cannot get through the fire exit, the revolving door can be completely folded back to allow very good access. I have been shown how to do this, and intend to train every gopher and anyone else who's interested in it, how to do it. The hotel have shown every sign of being helpful and friendly, but best to be prepared. I would expect that the ramp will be down and the doors open most of Friday afternoon as the dealers come in and out as well.

The hotel has 11 floors - ground floor reception, Mezzanine bar area, which we probably won't use, first floor restaurant which we will use, second floor main con bar, dealer's room, OPs and registration, eighth floor workshops, ninth floor artshow, smaller bar and programme room. All other floors are bedrooms and there are bedrooms on the second and eighth floor as well.

There are three lifts to each floor - two public lifts and one staff lift. There are also fire escape stairs between all floors and public stairs between the ground, mezzanine and first floors. Both public lifts and all public rooms appear both wheelchair and scooter accessible. We've calculated that it will take ten minutes for the entire membership to travel by lift from the second to the ninth floor. The staff lift can be used by the membership, but appears very difficult for wheelchair access - I'd stick to the public lifts.

All the public areas on each floor are flat, with no stairs. Many of the doors are on springs and may prove difficult to open without assistance. Most entrances to public rooms are double doored and will be left open where possible. The artshow and dealers room appear large enough that they should not be crowded and manoeuvring should be reasonable.

The hotel has certain bedrooms they provide to people with access difficulties. None of them are fully accessible. All the bedroom doors are standard width, but they can remove the bathroom doors, if requested. I would suggest contacting the hotel in advance to make doubly sure they are aware of any potential difficulties. I believe wheelchairs will be able to get into the rooms, but I don't think scooters will be able to. It should be possible to get the hotel to take care of a scooter and recharge it overnight.

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me, Pat McMurray, on 07775 803 297 or the Britannia Hotel on 0121 631 3331. I hope the above is of some assistance.

The Complicated Bit

As you will have read in Carol's "Chair's Bit" above following the "success" of last year's road closure the City Manager has decided to close New Street to *all* traffic (other than pedestrians) between 10am and 10pm every day from Saturday 6th November 1999. Before 10am and after 10pm deliveries/loading/unloading can take place using the Britannia's loading bays on New Street as indicated above. (Strange that last year the City Manager's office blamed it on a "Police initiative" - now they're taking the "credit" themselves!)

This means that anyone wishing to move stuff to and from Novacon from Saturday morning onwards will have to use the parking bays on Corporation Street. These are situated on Corporation Street, facing C&As and near Lloyds Bank.

NB: The following instructions only apply to wheelchair users and people who have large amounts of equipment etc. to unload, who will be arriving AFTER 10am on Saturday 6th November! Those arriving on Friday can follow the instructions in Pat McMurray and Tony Berry's pieces above!

From St Martins Circus Queensway (with the Rotunda and entrance to New Street on your left) follow the road bearing left up Moor Street Queensway to the first large island and turn left. An Argos Superstore is

on your left, turn left (after the lights) into Corporation Street and follow the road down to C&As - the Britannia's unloading/ loading bay will be on your right just past Lloyds.

From here the Britannia is actually behind C&As: cross the road and walk down Warwick Passage with C&As on your right. Turn right past C&As' rear entrance and the entrance to the Britannia is on your right a few yards down Union Passage. (If you run into problems call the Britannia Hotel on 0121 631 3331.)

Alternatively, if you can arrange to arrive after 6pm you are allowed to drive down Warwick Passage and unload by the bollards at the rear entrance to C&As (the Britannia have tried, and failed, to get a permit to "open" the bollards) - this brings you considerably closer to the hotel and saves you having to transport stuff across Corporation Street. Please note, however, that you cannot park here! (From Corporation Street, continue straight down on to Stephenson Street following it round to the right and then bear left onto Navigation Street and turn left at the (strange) lights into Hill Street - the Pallasades NCP is signposted.

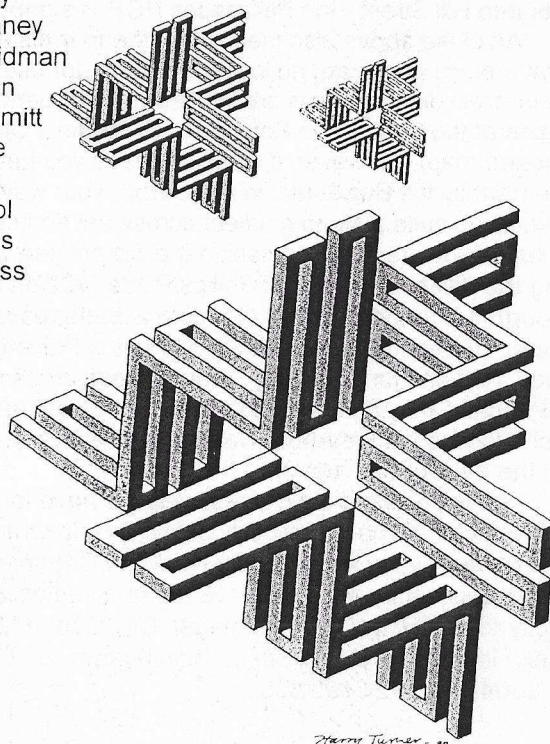
All of the above also means that the four disabled bays referred to in Pat's piece above are no longer available for use from 6th November. The nearest disabled bays are in the small car park next to the Bar St Martins at the base of the Rotunda in St Martin's Circus (#23 on the enclosed map). However, if these are used you have get onto the pavement by the Bar St Martin's and work your way around the side of the Rotunda up quite a steep gradient across severely smashed paving stones. If you are unaccompanied the Committee would recommend using the disabled bays in St Philips Place (#22 on the enclosed map) - although it is further to travel the route is better paved, level and brightly lit at night. (From the parking bay in St Philips Place head towards the Lloyds TSB and turn right into Cherry Street, cross Corporation Street at the Pelican Crossing and head straight on to Union Street, turn right into Union Passage at the Abbey National and the Britannia is on your right, past the back of C&As.)

I have enclosed the clearest map we have found, albeit that the disabled information is obviously of use only to Orange Badge Holders.

I urge anyone who (like the Novacon Committee and the Britannia Hotel) are unhappy with the above reorganised access to complain directly to: The City Centre Manager, City Centre Management, 6th Floor, Essex House, 27 Temple Street, Birmingham, B2 5DB. (Telephone 0121 303 3004, Fax 0121 303 3332).

Novacon 29 members from 11th September to 12th October

205	Allen Baum
206	Donya Hazard White
207	Ken Slater
208	Katherine Hodges
209	Steve Dunn
210	Anders Holmstrom
211	Lennart Uhlin
212	Linda Krawecka
213	Patrick Curzon
214	Phil Nye
215	Lee Banyon
216	John Meaney
217	Yvonne Meaney
218	Barbara Weidman
219	Jim Anderson
220	Georgia Schmitt
221	Mike Christie
222	Rob Hanson
223	Avedon Carol
224	Janet Jenkins
225	Brian W Aldiss





CITY CENTRE

